**Gimme Shelter**

With the new year in full swing, community bankers are obliged to do everything we can to make 2018 as good as possible for our institutions and local communities. That means planning how we can not only meet the banking needs of our friends and neighbors but also defend them in an era of rising security risks.

From natural disasters to cybercrime, the community banking industry must protect itself and the integrity of the customers it proudly serves. Fortunately, our nationwide reach is our strength, offering us the option of cooperative and collective security and recovery. And that is precisely how Sheltered Harbor aims to improve the overall resiliency of our industry.

Sheltered Harbor is a financial-services sector initiative that enables financial institutions to securely store and rapidly reconstitute account information while recovering from a cyber incident or natural disaster. The aim is to allow continued customer access through a service provider or another financial institution. Sheltered Harbor provides standards and processes for the daily storage and backup of customer deposit information in an offline data vault so it remains available in the case of a debilitating incident.

Here’s how it works. All participating institutions make a daily copy of account data in a standard format that is archived in a secure, decentralized data vault. The data remains intact and, if needed, is accessible exactly as it was when it was archived. All participating institutions update their adherence reviews to ensure that the Sheltered Harbor standards are exercised consistently.

This data storage allows a peer institution or core service provider to restore account information in case of a major cyber event or other disaster, minimizing the impact to customers. If your disaster recovery and business continuity plans fail, your restoring partner can service your customers in a relatively short time period. In other words, Sheltered Harbor participants have each other’s backs.

Consumer data stored in a Sheltered Harbor data vault is encrypted, cannot be altered and is strictly confidential. While a community bank would hope not to have to use the program, it offers all the insurance necessary should a breach or other incident occur. Sheltered Harbor is the answer if all other disaster recovery options have been exhausted—a fallout shelter for customer data.

Operated by the Financial Services Information Sharing and Analysis Center (FS-ISAC), Sheltered Harbor is led by a 34-member board of directors broadly representative of the financial services industry. ICBA has had a seat at the table since the inception of the initiative, is a member of the board of directors and collaborates with other industry associations on the initiative.

While Sheltered Harbor is a voluntary industry initiative, I hope that all community banks will participate over time. With security risks at an all-time high, this is a necessary step for the well-being of the community banking industry and its customers. Together, we will do whatever it takes to plan ahead, protect our customers and ensure our beloved community banking industry continues to flourish.

Visit icba.org/shelteredharbor to learn more about or join Sheltered Harbor.